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INTERSTATE SWAPS AND PURCHASES AID GAME RESTORATION PROGRAM

Days when a raccoon skin with tail attached would buy a pound of sugar and leave you a muskrat pelt in change have long since passed into history, but--

Information available to the Fish and Wildlife Service shows that:

Not very long ago Colorado traded 16 of its mountain sheep to Montana for eight mountain goats;

South Dakota sent surplus catfish to Colorado for wild turkeys;

New Mexico sent eight turkeys to South Dakota and got 25 sage grouse in return

Wyoming delivered some elk of which it had more than enough to New Mexico for some turkeys it needed.

These are just some of the trades which have been going on in this country in recent years as the various States work to build their wildlife back toward what it was when the "paleface" began his trek from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Almost continuously game mammals, game birds and game fish are part and parcel of legal interstate traffic (or at least being considered for such interstate traffic). Some of the activities are strictly between States while others have Uncle Sam, represented by the Fish and Wildlife Service, acting as a sort of catalytic agent.

Swapping beast for beast, beast for bird or bird for fish has proved successful in the rejuvenation of many game ranges and fishing waters but most of the transplanting of wildlife has been done on a "purchase" basis. The purchase price is either the cost of trapping and transporting the animals from the old home to the new, or a "per head" cost, f.o.b. which averages out the cost of the trapping operation.

Passage by the Congress of the Pittman-Robertson Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act in 1937 paved the way for scientific and effective wildlife restoration programs. The Dingell-Johnson Federal Aid in Fish Restoration Act of 1950 provided similar opportunities in the fisheries field.

The money to finance these activities comes from those who hunt and fish. Income from the excise taxes on sporting arms and ammunition and on sport fishing tackle is earmarked in the United States Treasury and appropriated by the Congress for apportionment on a formula basis to State fish and game departments.

The program is administered by the Secretary of the Interior through the Fish and Wildlife Service. Sound fish and wildlife restoration projects submitted by the States are approved by the Secretary, and the States receive reimbursement for 75 percent of the cost of the work satisfactorily performed.

Restocking the land and waters is one of the many types of projects which get Federal aid financing. The Fish and Wildlife Service has two prerequisites which must be met in the restocking programs--the receiving area must be a habitat suitable for the wildlife introduced, and there must be adequate protection against predators and hunters. Usually a minimum five-year closed season is required as far as big game transplants are concerned.

Hence the restocking program has not been a helter-skelter transportation of game from one wide open space to another, but it has been an orderly and business-like process with everything possible being done to assure success. And the number of failures has been rare.

All restocking programs financed by Federal aid funds have been based on habitat studies. In some cases the game was selected to fit the existing habitat and in other cases the habitat was improved to fit the game desired. When authentic information was not available--and usually it was not--necessary investigational projects were instituted.

Some States probed food problems while others studied ways and means of trapping and transporting, the best age for transplanting and how to introduce a species to a new range. Information was distributed widely and whenever similarity of investigations permitted the results were compared.

The number of projects relating to restocking--habitat research and movement of fish and game--run into the hundreds. Since the program of rebuilding wildlife values was given its first big emphasis in 1937 by the passage of the Pittman-Robertson Act, every State in the Union has put Federal aid funds to work in an intelligent and effective manner. Some of the recent activities in restocking the range through Federal aid financing include:

During Fiscal Years 1954 and 1955 the State of Ohio restocked ruffed grouse, eastern wild turkey and snowshoe hare on formerly occupied range.

The 142 eastern wild turkeys were purchased from a private source in Maryland. The 200 ruffed grouse were live-trapped and shipped from the premises of a private game farm in Wisconsin. The 50 snowshoe hare were live-trapped in northern Wisconsin by a private trapper and arrangements for exportation were made between the Wisconsin Conservation Department and the Ohio Division of Wildlife.

Through the cooperation of the province of British Columbia, the State of Oregon and the Fish and Wildlife Service, the California Bighorn Sheep has been reintroduced into some of its original range. A remnant herd of this subspecies has been holding its own in the Williams Lake area of British Columbia.

These three agencies reached an agreement by which a nucleus breeding herd of these fine animals would be trapped in British Columbia and transported to the Hart Mountain National Antelope Range and released in a 500-acre enclosure constructed by the State of Oregon.

On November 4, 1954, a band of sheep were caught at the trap site in British Columbia and the Oregon officials were notified. Telephone conversations between officials of the Oregon State Game Commission, the British Columbia Game Department, American Consulate General, the United States Bureau of Customs and the Canadian Customs Office cleared the necessary certificates of importation. The 20 sheep were put in a truck and transported about 1,000 miles in 36 hours and released on November 8 in their new Oregon home.

In the spring of 1955 eight lambs were born of which six survived. One adult ewe has also succumbed. Twenty-five animals remain,

Various private, State and Federal agencies are cooperating in an attempt to reestablish the Desert Bighorn Sheep in the Big Bend country of Texas. After several meetings and exchanges of correspondence between the Texas Game and Fish Commission, the Arizona Game and Fish Commission, the Boone and Crockett Club, the Wildlife Management Institute, the National Park Service, and the Fish and Wildlife Service, arrangements have been made to trap a nucleus herd from the Service's Kofa Refuge in Arizona to be transplanted on the State's Black Gap Game Management Area in Texas, which is adjacent to the Big Bend National Park.

Under this project Arizona Game and Fish Commission personnel will do the trapping on the Kofa Refuge and the animals will be transported to Texas where a suitable enclosure has been constructed.

Surplus elk from Yellowstone National Park were trapped by the National Park Service. The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish received 16 of the animals on March 17, 1954, and released them in the Gila Wilderness. In January and February 1955, 106 elk from Yellowstone National Park were released on three approved areas in New Mexico.

The State of North Dakota has restocked antelope into formerly occupied range.

Excess antelope from Yellowstone National Park periodically drift from the park boundary onto private land after the close of legal harvest seasons in Montana. The National Park Service has recognized that over-populations of big game animals are detrimental to the range. Transplanting big game animals from overstocked habitat to areas outside the parks is the method preferred by that Service for reducing such populations.

Accordingly, an agreement was reached between the Montana Fish and Game Commission and the North Dakota Game and Fish Department providing that antelope would be live-trapped and transferred. In the winter of 1953-54, 191 antelope were trapped in Montana, trucked to North Dakota and released in two previously approved sites. In January 1955, 173 additional animals were released on three approved sites.

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